



Written by [Luis Miguel](#) on January 26, 2024

## Florida House Passes Landmark Bill to Keep Kids Off “Addictive” Social Media

Republicans in the Sunshine State are making major advances toward cracking down on exorbitant social media consumption by minors.

On Wednesday, the GOP-controlled Florida House of Representatives passed a bill that would keep individuals under age 16 off a number of social media platforms, making for one of the strictest social media restrictions in the nation if passed.

As [Politico](#) notes, while the plan still requires the Senate’s approval, it is being heavily pushed by Republican House Speaker Paul Renner. The speaker has made it a hallmark of his agenda in this legislative session to safeguard children from the damaging effects of irresponsible internet usage, pairing the aforementioned legislation with a bill that would curb access to pornographic websites — a proposal which also passed on Wednesday.



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The social media bill is similar to plans being considered in other states in order to clamp down on minors’ use of social media platforms deemed “addictive.”

Rep. Fiona McFarland, a Sarasota Republican who co-sponsored the legislation, argued that “These dopamine hits [from social media] are so addictive, it’s like a digital fentanyl. And even the most plugged-in parent or attuned teen has a hard time shutting the door against these addictive features.”

The bill in question, [FL HB1 \(24R\)](#), would force social media platforms to ban anyone under the age of 16 from creating an account, requiring the use of third-party age verification. Already-existing profiles for those under the age of 16 would be terminated.

*Politico* further reports:

Florida’s proposal notably would not apply to websites that are predominantly used for email, messaging or texts, along with streaming services, news, sports or entertainment sites, and online shopping or gaming. Still, the legislation has caused confusion about which companies would be covered under the law.

In an attempt to clarify what apps are actually targeted, lawmakers on Tuesday added new language outlawing platforms with “addictive, harmful, or deceptive design features” that are meant to grab users and keep them engaged.

These definitions proved too weak for some Democrats, leading to questions surrounding



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the fate of specific platforms like Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat and YouTube. Officials with Meta, the owner of Facebook and Instagram, claim the amendment only muddied the legal waters of the bill and believe the company would fall outside its scope.

Complicating matters is the fact that the Republican lawmakers pushing the bill have not offered the name of any one app they anticipate would be affected by the bill, stating that they are “not going to get into specific companies.” However, this strategy may be to avoid potential legal challenges based on the accusation that Republicans are writing legislation to target specific firms.

Florida’s GOP leaders argue that the proposed social media restrictions aim to address significant challenges affecting children statewide. These challenges encompass issues like bullying, depression, social pressure, and even instances of suicide linked to social media use. The legislation seeks to empower parents by allowing them to pursue legal action against social media companies that fail to remove children’s accounts. This legal recourse includes the potential for parents to receive damages and court fees, with amounts reaching up to \$10,000.

However, critics have strongly criticized the legislation, arguing that it does not provide parents with sufficient influence in the decision-making process. They assert that a comprehensive ban on social media could limit access to meaningful friendships and valuable web resources that are important to many children and teenagers. Additionally, opponents raise concerns that such a ban might negatively impact minors who earn income as online influencers.

Florida Republicans’ plan notably goes further than the bills being pushed in other states. In Utah, for example, a new law with similar intentions merely requires that social media companies make individuals under 18 get permission from their parents in order to set up an account. These new regulations, which won’t even take effect until October, are already being challenged in court by a trade group representing Meta, TikTok, and X, among others.

The other bill passed by the Florida House on Wednesday, [FL HB3 \(24R\)](#), seeks to eliminate minors’ access to adult content. The legislation mandates that websites publishing content deemed “harmful to minors” must implement “reasonable” measures to confirm the user’s age and prevent access for individuals under 18. Similar to the social media bill, the age-verification procedures need to be overseen by a third-party service.

“TikTok brain” is a term some researchers are now using to describe the shortened attention span conditioned by the short, super-stimulating video format of TikTok and related platforms such as YouTube Shorts.

According to a report by [The Wall Street Journal](#), “A flood of dopamine reinforces cravings for something enjoyable, whether it’s a tasty meal, a drug or a funny TikTok video.” This brain conditioning makes it difficult for people, particularly young people, “to participate in activities that don’t offer instant gratification.”

Thus, the new push to curb youth consumption of social media, coupled with restrictions on underage access to porn, could prove to be one of the most consequential acts for the mental well-being of future generations.



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